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A Story of Kentucky

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(Continued.)

"Would any of you gentlemen like to try the hammer, and set a heavy iron on the anvil?" Harrison asked.

"Thank you, no," he said, "it is beyond my aspirations."

Peden seized the handle in a tight grasp and swung the hammer once or twice on the anvil, but it was obviously with an effort and he put it down again, panting.

"It proves to me that I'm a farmer and not a blacksmith," he said, "I've enough. What do you think you could do, Clarke? With a shoulder and chest like yours, you ought to have a lot of strength."

"Maybe I have," I said recklessly. "At any rate I'll try."

I took off my overcoat and gloves, and seizing the handle, I swung the hammer lightly aloft. The soft, familiar feel of it, familiar despite the fact that it was a different hammer, sent a singular thrill through me. For the moment I was companion to Carter, the convict, a brother in the same work, and I was proud because I could wield the great sledge so easily. My muscles tightened and my lungs filled with air, much, I think as those of a medieval knight must have done when he faced a worthy enemy in the tournament.

The iron had been heated again and placed upon the anvil. Crash! I brought the hammer down upon it. And then a sudden shiver passed over me, and I brought it down again and then again and again. The shop rang with the blows and I heard little cries of surprise that pleased me. It was not of me and mine that I was proud, but of the human mind which rebelled at times against long suppression, and, for the moment, I was in a state in which I did not care. The thoughtless boy was in the stationer's shop.

The iron was beaten out flat in much less time than Carter had taken. Then I cast the great hammer aside and began to work on the iron with my overcoat and gloves. Harrison gave me a critical examining look.

"Upon my word, Clarke," he said in his usual vein of light irony, "you are quite a prodigy. I should have thought that 'Yok' would do that without long and hard training."

Carter was staring at me. "I didn't think anybody in the world but Charlie Johnson could do it," he said, and a sudden shiver passed over me. All at once I realized my folly, and the insensate boyish pride in mere muscularity slipped from me.

"I trained hard at a college with the club and ball, though I was still careless, and then I turned to leave the shop, expecting the others to follow just as a group always follows any one who pushes himself forward as a leader. I was right, and I quickly had them out of the shop, but as I went I was conscious that Carter's eyes were following me in a stare of bewilderment. Harrison also came me two or three more critical looks, but he seemed to be taking a sort of physical measurement of me, instead of nourishing suspicions."

I felt better when I was outside in the clear cold air, though I still inwardly bewailed my folly. I was anxious now to leave the penitentiary at once, as the sight of it weighed upon me, but I did not choose to hurry. I had a notion that I should still have the idea that I was anxious to get away from something. Of him alone I had any fear, because he alone was interested in watching me. But he did not revert to the subject and he was the one presently to suggest that we end the visit.

When we left the penitentiary, I returned to my room. Then I felt the shiver of apprehension again, but it quickly passed. How could any one now connect me with Charles Johnson, the convict. The links that would have bound me to him were not only broken, but they were absolutely missing. Such a thing as a similar identity would seem to the world impossible in this case.

### CHAPTER X.

Grey's Ambition.

The first two or three weeks of the session were of a routine nature, productive only of much subtle scheming in their nature or of a merely local interest, but at the end of that time the torch that started a conflagration was lighted.

The national census had been taken, and under the reapportionment Kentucky with her high birth rate became entitled to an increase of one representative in the Lower House of Congress. It was the duty of the Legislature to make the reapportionment, that is to create the new Congressional districts and, in this business, I soon saw the sinister hand of Harrison.

He had been working his progress in the House by the double weapons of charm and fear. He attracted some by his knowledge and wit and others were frightened by his sarcasm and willingness to say cutting things. I saw that he was becoming a power, although I did not fathom even yet the depth of his designs. He was showing the deepest interest in public life, and his attention was assiduous. The new game with its vast complexity and variety, its heights and depths pleased him.

An appointment bill gives an opportunity for much subtle scheming, but my friend Peden, brought in the first one which was strictly fair. It was evident, however, from the beginning that Peden's just measure would meet powerful opposition, and that a certain faction within the majority party was bent on getting every advantage it could, whether the means be fair or unfair. Harrison in a biting speech, characterized the bill as quixotic, and I learned that a new one, making an obviously one-sided and unjust apportionment, would be presented by a machine member named Connor, from Louisville. But I guessed that its father was Harrison, and that he had written it. I now began to suspect also that he meant to make himself the Democratic leader of the State; that is, the Kingmaker.

The fight over the measure thickened fast, and soon the lines were sharply drawn. Harrison, the indications holding good, was the life and soul of the opposition. His own bill was not yet presented as the fact of the Peden measure was to be decided by Democratic caucus, after which the party would be bound by the decision of the majority, whatever that might be.

It seemed that Harrison would certainly be triumphant, and his opponents could do nothing at present but fight for delay. It was probably because the case looked so desperate that I became the leader of the supporters, nobody else wanting the place. People generally spoke of me as the champion, and as it became a habit with others I began to regard myself in that light also.

Thus affairs dragged for about two weeks, and one afternoon I went for one of my favorite walks on the hills. It was still the dead of winter and the river yet lay under its glittering sheet of ice, but the crisp atmosphere was full of vitality and life. I met Judge Wharton and we walked on together, talking at first about topics which formed the general food of conversation. After a while he came to our

fight in the House.

"I've followed your course there, Mr. Clarke," he said.

"What do you think of it?" I asked anxiously—I wanted very much to have his good opinion.

"It is what I expected you would do," he said. "Do you know, Mr. Clarke, that you have the qualities of a fighter?"

"No," I replied in some surprise, "I did not know it."

"Doubtless you did not. But most people with slow tempers are tenacious. You don't repeat what I say, but I think you ought to continue the battle, though that is superfluous advice to you. It is an opening for you. You are on the right side, and if you fail, you fall in a good cause with all the odds against you, but if you succeed, you will have achieved a wonderful triumph."

"What," he said, sank deeply in my mind and confirmed me in my course. When I left him I felt encouraged and uplifted, because it was a great gratification to me to have his approval.

We parted at the outskirts of the city, and I strolled on by the Capitol and then walked toward the railroad station. As I approached the latter I saw a figure in a white coat and a top hat walking briskly. The familiar look of the upright carriage and the shoulders well thrown back, told me that it was Harrison. I should not have paid any more attention to him, but just then a Louisville train pulled in and a man who alighted from it shook hands with him warmly.

The man who alighted from the train fell directly upon the face of the man and with a start I recognized Grey. I should have turned away at once, but he saw me and called out in a blunt manner that he meant to be friendly.

"How are you, Clarke? I say since you shake hands with a fellow since you've got to be a great man?"

"I should be glad to see me, Clarke, old fellow," he said, "because I'm going to stay in this tight little town of yours for a while. I hear that a man can have a good time here when the Legislature is in session."

"It depends upon what one calls a good time," I replied.

"We know what a good time is, don't we?" he exclaimed, thrusting his elbow into my side with hideous familiarity. I drew off from him with as much dignity as I could muster and replied far from merrily.

"No," I do not," he said, "but he refused to be repulsed, hooked me on one arm, Harrison on the other and insisted on walking thus to the capitol. He was a powerful fellow, not a crowded place and it was dark. I was spared spectators, save a nervous boy or two, and at the steps of the hotel I was able to detach myself. I turned to the lobby after dinner and found Harrison smoking in a corner alone. I drew up a chair and sat down near him.

"Why have you brought him here?" I asked.

He took his cigar from his mouth, held it lightly between his fingers and regarded me with innocent wonder. "If I brought him here?" he repeated.

"Yes," I said impatiently. "You know that you did. We've been frank with each other so far. Why cease now?"

"That's true," he replied meditatively. "There is no reason why we should cease. You are right. I did bring him here, but having anything else to do, has allowed himself to be attacked by the political mania. He has got the foolish idea which some people have that money can do anything. He is a powerful fellow, but in the State and he is wild enough to believe that if he poured out some scores of thousands, he might get the nomination for the Governorship or something equally as good. So I've told him to come down to Frankfort and get acquainted."

"I looked directly into his eyes and I said: 'That isn't all.'"

I saw a faint flush creep into his cheeks, but in a moment it was gone. "Like snow on the desert's dusty face," he said, "it isn't all," he replied calmly.

"I might have known that you would guess it. I brought him because he is going to bring Mrs. Grey. I want to see her here. What have you to say about it?"

I felt a flush in my own cheeks and I saw him smile. "I'm serving you as well as myself. Now, Clarke, be frank and admit to me that either you or I ought to have her. Such a man as that is not worthy of the ownership of Alice Grey."

He jerked his finger toward the ceiling. Grey was somewhere in a room above. But I felt the flush on my own cheeks, and I did not like his way of speaking of Alice.

"I don't want to discuss her with anybody," I said.

"He laughed again. 'I know just how you stand without your saying a word. But you are more of a Puritan than I am.'"

His smile was hateful to me, but I knew that he understood me. Ah, if the whole truth be told, I should rather have seen her wife of Harrison than of Grey. He at least was a man who valued her at her full worth. However, I rose and with a nod I left him.

"Think it over," he called after me. Harrison had not exaggerated Grey's folly. The man was a genuine candidate for the Governorship, that is for the Democratic nomination, which was equivalent to an election. He engaged a large suite of apartments in the best hotel and began to entertain lavishly. Harrison, I could see, was egging him on, and the measure, holding a restraining hand over him, but he was regarded, nevertheless, as what politicians call an "easy thing." While Harrison might modify his political propaganda, he did not seek to interfere with his personal conduct or expenditures. Wine was flowing incessantly in Grey's rooms and he was, at all times, a jolly good fellow. His immediate followers were making him believe that his success as a candidate was assured. The infatuated man saw now that he had heard them, but he would not believe them, and he was not the one most to blame because he dwelled in his foolish heaven.

"Harrison," he said one day, "why are you tricking Grey in this manner?"

"Tricking him?" he repeated, raising his eyebrows. "What do you allow him to trick himself? It is absurd to believe that the State of Kentucky would take such a man as Governor. Why do you let him think such a thing and be led by all these leeches?"

"There are many reasons," he replied meditatively. "In the first place Grey is a very stubborn person. I think you are wrong in assuming that I could turn him from his course, and in the second place I want him here in Frankfort. Grey is coming tomorrow. He arrived this day, but I did

not see her, until I went down to dinner at the hotel. You must understand that Frankfort is a small place and that it is not possible to avoid anybody there long. Knowing this, I made no attempt at evasion. I was in customary seat at a small table by one of the windows, and I was alone there. I had been looking out of the window at the bands of sunshine across the snowy street, and when I turned my eyes back again I saw Alice and her husband entering the dining room. It was the latest version of Beauty, and the Beast. The noble spiritual quality that I admired so much in Alice seemed to me more clearly defined than ever. Pale and sad she was, but her head was erect and she had that pride for which I know no other name than the pride of purity. But the sadness in the beautiful eyes was unmistakable. Quietly dressed and quiet in manner, she was a wonderful contrast to her flamboyant husband, who radiated noisy color. I noticed with a sort of secret pleasure that she did not come in by the side of him, but walked a little ahead, as if she did not believe in him in the intimate manner of husband and wife.

She did not see me—my table stood in a little alcove, partly hidden by curtains—and I watched her for a little while. She still preserved at the table her attitude of aloofness and the couple were silent. I could see that Grey felt some fear of her, his stiff manner, his few words and his occasional wary glances at her indicated it. The Grey of this moment was a very different Grey from the Grey of his political headquarters, and I was glad to know it.

Presently they became three at the table and the third person was Harrison. He took his seat as if he belonged there, and his manner was quite intimate. Grey seemed to feel relief at his coming, but Alice's face expressed nothing. I watched them yet a little while longer and I saw more clearly than ever before Harrison's influence over Grey; it might extend further than politics, and my seeing it was the reason why I rose and went over to their table.

Knowing the Greys so well it was the proper thing for me to speak to them at once, but I probably should not have done so had it not been for Harrison's pervading presence and the feelings that it aroused in me.

I think I detected a slight look of reserve on Harrison's face, when he saw me, and that gave me pleasure. Grey frowned—apparently he wished to be my friend, only when his wife was absent—but Alice gave me a smile of welcome—there was nothing in ordinary social intercourse forbidding it, and I told her in a formal, commonplace manner that I was glad to see her in Frankfort. They asked me to sit at their table, and I accepted, the waiter making the change for me.

I confess that while I spoke in a commonplace manner my feelings were far from being so. We four whose lives were connected in such a singular way and which were destined to be interwoven yet more closely as we sat around a common table and saying idle words as if we were mere chance acquaintances who had met and would pass.

Harrison did most of the talking, retelling social gossip that he had brought down from Louisville and I seemed to detect a slight strain under his apparently easy and indifferent manner. I thought, but contented myself with occasional glances at Alice. I wondered what she thought of Harrison, whether she regarded him as a platonic friend who wished in an unobtrusive way to give her his intellectual and moral sympathy, but she neither did nor said anything that would indicate her thoughts.

"After this," Grey said, they expected to see a good deal of me now, as we were staying at the same hotel and ought to meet many times in Frankfort. I replied with a polite nothing and then we entered the large parlor.

I wanted to have a few words alone with Alice, I had nothing particular to say, but I wished to say it apart from those two men. It was hard to get the chance. Harrison watched me like a hawk, and Alice herself made no opportunity. But a member came presently to the door and asked to see Harrison just a moment on political business. He could not well refuse, and Grey, with his sense of importance, was for granted that he also was concerned, stepped into the hall with him.

"I am sorry you have come here," I said to Alice.

"But I had to come. It was my place," she said.

She turned upon me a look so sad, so appealing, which said so plainly, "Do not scold me, do not add to my burdens. That I had no heart to say more. But even then she was thinking more of me than of herself.

"Do they—any of them—suspect that you were—were—?" she began to ask.

I knew well what she meant and saved her the pain of saying "in prison" here.

"I do not think so," I replied, "unless possibly Mr. Harrison—I did a foolish thing once, of which I shall tell you later."

Harrison and Grey came back at that moment, and Grey frowned when he saw me talking to Alice, although, for all he knew, we might have been discussing the weather. It was curious that he should regard me again with suspicion, while placing the most implicit confidence in Harrison, who was not to be trusted at all.

"Come, Alice," he said roughly, "I think we'd better go up to our own rooms. You'll excuse us, Mr. Clarke."

"Few things," I said, "ever hurt me more. I saw Alice's face whiten, and she flinched a little as if she had been struck, but she was his, she belonged to him body, if not soul, and without a word she followed him, just as I suppose in the ancient times, a beautiful Greek captive had to follow her brutal Roman lord and master. I should have been kind of the right to strike him down, but the right was all on his side, and I could do nothing but stay in the parlor and drum angrily on the window sill with my fingers.

Harrison came up to me, and his look showed amusement and also a certain sympathy.

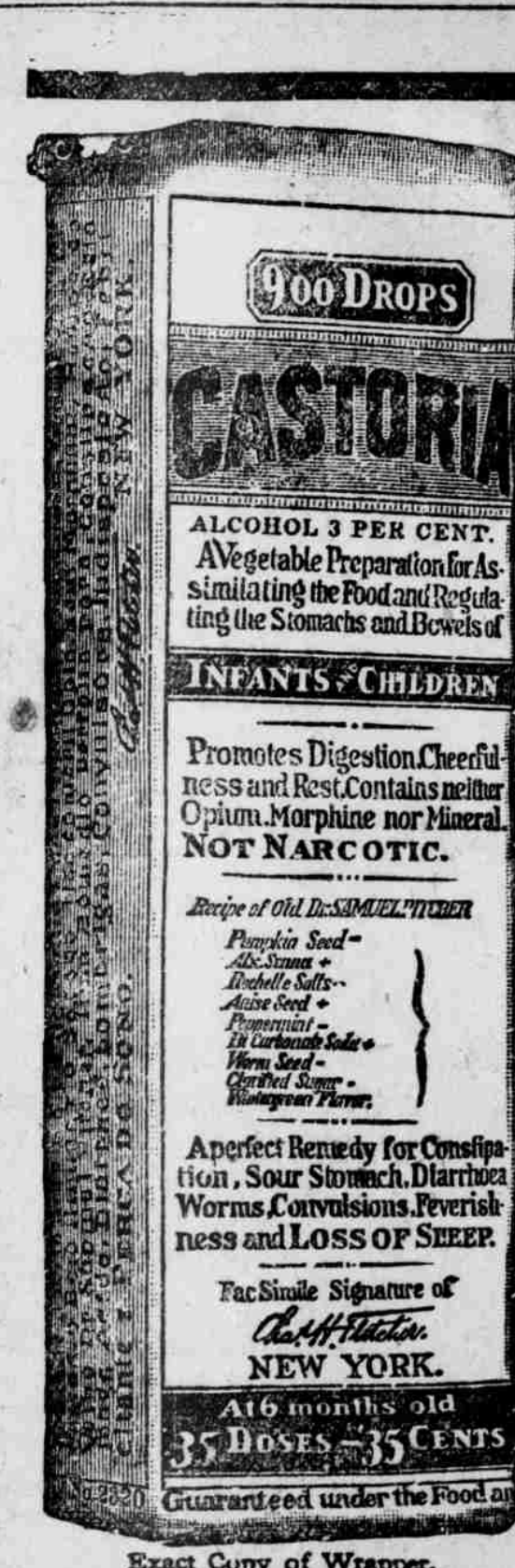
"I understand your feelings, Mr. Clarke," he said. "Why shouldn't I? I share them. I asked you once before why you didn't use your knowledge. It would be to your benefit not to mine—well why don't you? And rescue her?"

(To be Continued.)

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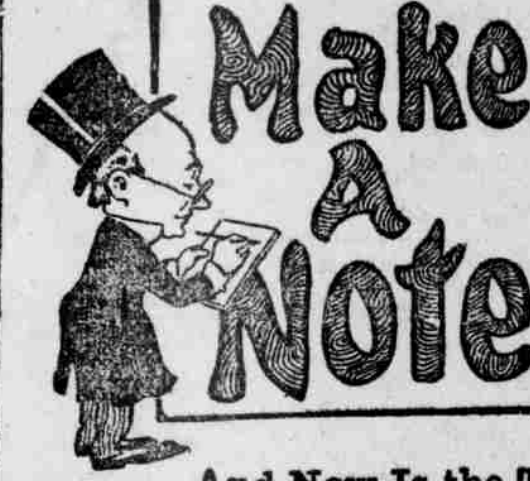
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